a tree with a bird in it

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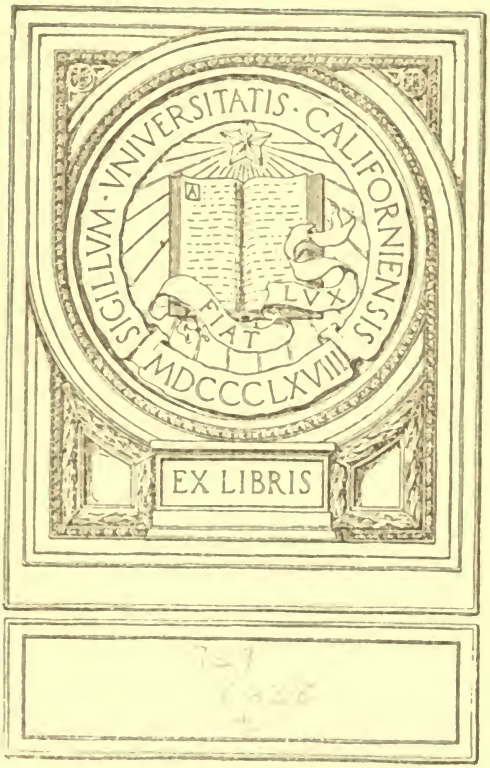
Margaret Widdemer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A TREE WITH A BIRD IN IT

A TREE WITH A BIRD IN IT:

A SYMPOSIUM OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETS ON BEING SHOWN A PEAR-TREE ON WHICH SAT A GRACKLE

BY

MARGARET WIDDEMER

AUTHOR OF "FACTORIES," "THE OLD ROAD TO PARADISE," "CROSS CURRENTS," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WILLIAM SAPHIER

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THIS IS DEDICATED
WITH MY FORGIVENESS IN ADVANCE
TO THE POETS PARODIED IN THIS BOOK
AND THE POETS NOT PARODIED IN THIS BOOK

50-40 50

FOREWORD

By the Collator

A little while since, I had the fortune to live in a house, outside of whose windows there grew a pear-tree. On the branches of this tree lived a green bird of indeterminate nature. I do not know what his real name was, but the name, to quote our great exemplar Lewis Carroll, by which his name was *called* was the Grackle. He seemed perfectly willing to be addressed thus, and accordingly was.

Aside from watching the Pear-Tree and the Grackle, my other principal occupation that winter was watching the Poetry Society of America now and then at its monthly meetings. It occurred to me finally to invite such members of it as cared to come, following many good examples, to an outdoor symposium under the tree. The result follows.

Margaret Widdemer.

P. S.—The tree died.

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A TREE WITH A BIRD IN IT

Jessie B. Rittenhouse

(She steps brightly forward with an air of soprano introduction.)

RESIGNATION

I look from out my window,
  Beloved, and I see
A bird upon a pear bough,
  But what is that to me?

Because the thought comes icy;
  That bird you never knew—
It's not your bird or pear tree,
  And what is it to you?

Edwin Markham

(who, though he had to lay a cornerstone, unveil a bust of somebody, give two lectures and write encouraging introductions to the works of five young poets before catching the three-ten for Staten Island, offered his reaction in a benevolent and unhurried manner.)

THE BIRD WITH THE WOE

Poets to men a curious sight afford;
Still they will sing, though all around are bored;
But this wise grackle does a kinder thing;
Silent he's bored, while all around him sing!

SAPHIER

SAPNIER

Witter Bynner

(Prefaced by a short baritone talk on Chinese architecture.)

THE UNITY OF ONENESS

Celia, have you been to China?
  There upon a mystic tree
Sits a bird who murmurs Chinese
  Of the Me in Thee.

'Neath that tree of willow-pattern
  Twice seven thousand scornful go
Paraphrasers and translators
  Of the long-deceased Li-Po:

Chinese feelings swift discerning
  Without all this time and fuss
Let us eat that bird, thus learning
  Of the Him in Us!

Amy Lowell

(Fixing her glasses firmly on the rest of the Poetry Society in a way which makes them with difficulty refrain from writhing.)

OISEAURIE

Glunk!
I toss my heels up to my head . . .
That was a bird I heard say glunk
As I walked statelily through my extensive, expensive English country estate
In a pink brocade with silver buttons, a purple passementerie cut with panniers, a train, and faced with watered silk:

But it
Is dead now!
(The bird)
Probably putrescent
And green. . . .

I scrabble my toes . . .
Glunk!

Edgar Lee Masters

(Making a statement which you may take or leave, but convincing you entirely.)

IMRI SWAZEY

I was a shock-headed boy bringing in the laundry;
Why did I try for that damn bird, anyway?
I suppose I had been in the habit of aiming for the pears.
But I chucked a stone, anyhow,
And it ricocheted and hit my head,
And as it hadn't any brains inside the stone busted it
And there I was, dead.
And dead with me were all the improper things
I'd got out of the servants about their employers
Bringing in the laundry;
But the grackle sings on.
Sing forever, O grackle!
I died, knowing lots of things *you* don't know!

(He mutters wearily in an undertone.)

RAMBUNCTO

Well, they're quite dead, Rambuncto; thoroughly dead.
It was a natural thing enough; my eyes
Stared baffled down the forest-aisles, brown and green,
Not learning what the marks were. Still, who learns?
Not I, who stooped and picked the things that day,
Scarlet and gold and smooth, friend . . . smooth enough!
And she's in a vault now, old Jane Fotheringham,
My mother-in-law; and my wife's seven aunts,
And that cursed bird that used to sit and croak
Upon their pear-tree—they threw scraps to him—
My wife, too. Lord, that was a curious thing!
Because—"I don't like mushrooms much," I said,
And they ate all I picked. And then they died.
But . . . Well, who knows it isn't better that way?

It's quieter, at least. . . . Rambuncto—friend—
Why, you're not going? . . . Well—it's a stupid
year,
And the world's very useless. . . . Sorry. . . .
Still
The dusk intransience that I much prefer
Leaves place for little hope and less regret.
I don't suppose he'd care, to stay to dine
Under the circumstances. . . . What's life for?

Robert Frost

(Rather nervously, retreating with haste in the wake of Mr. Robinson as soon as he had finished.)

THE BIRD MISUNDERSTOOD

There was a grackle sat on our old pear tree—
Don't ask me why—I never did really know;
But he made my wife and me feel, for really the very first time
We were out in the actual country, hindering things to grow;

It gave us rather a queer feeling to hear the grackle grackle,
But when it got to be winter time he got up and went thence
And now we shall never know, though we watch the tree till April,
Whether his curious crying ever made song or sense.

Carl Sandburg

(Striking from time to time a few notes on a mouth-organ, with a wonderful effect of human brotherhood which does not quite include the East.)

CHICAGO MEMORIES

Grackles, trees—
I been thinkin' 'bout 'em all: I been thinkin' they're all right:
Nothin' much—Gosh, nothin' much against God, even.
God made little apples, a hobo sang in Kankakee,
Shattered apples, I picked you up under a tree, red wormy apples, I ate you. . . .
That lets God out.
There were three green birds on the tree, there were three wailing cats against a green dawn. . . .
'Gene Field sang, "The world is full of a number of things,"
'Gene Field said, "When they caught me I was living in a tree. . . ."
'Gene Field said everything in Chicago of the eighties.

Now he's dead, I say things, say 'em well, too. . . .
'Gene Field . . . back in the lost days, back in the eighties,
Singing, colyumning . . . 'Gene Field . . . forgotten . . .
Back in Arkansaw there was a green bird, too,
I can remember how he sang, back in the lost days, back in the eighties.
Uncle Yon Swenson under the tree chewing slowly, slowly. . . .
Memories, memories!
There are only trees now, no 'Gene, no eighties
Gray cats, I can feel your fur in my heart . . .
Green grackle, I remember now,
Back in the lost days, back in the eighties
The cat ate you.

SAPHIER

Edith M. Thomas

(She tells a friend in confidence, after she is safely out of it all.)

FROST AND SANDBURG TONIGHT

Apple green bird on a wooden bough,
And the brazen sound of a long, loud row,
And "Child, take the train, but mind what you do—
Frost, tonight, and Sandburg too!"

Then I sally forth, half wild, half cowed,
Till I come to the surging, impervious crowd,
The wine-filled, the temperance, the sober, the pied,
The Poets that cover the countryside!

The Poets I never would meet till tonight!
A gleam of their eyes in the fading light,
And I took them all in—the enormous throng—
And with one great bound I bolted along.

. . . . . .

If the garden had merely held birds and flowers!
But I hear a voice—they have talked for hours—
"Frost tonight—" if 'twere merely he!
Half wild, half cowed, I flee, I flee!

Charles Hanson Towne

(Who rather begrudged the time he used up in going out to the suburbs.)

THE UNQUIET SINGER

He had been singing, but I had not heard his voice;
He had been bothering the rest with song;
But I, most comfortably far
Within the city's stimulating jar
Feeling for bus-conductors and for flats,
And shop-girls buying too expensive hats,
And silver-serviced dinners,
And various kinds of pleasant urban sinners,
And riding on the subway and the L,
Had much beside his song to hear and tell.

But one day (it was Spring, when poets ride
Afield to wild poetic festivals)
I, innocently making calls
Was snatched by a swift motor toward his tree
(Alas, but lady poets will do this to thee
If thou art decorative, witty or a Man)
And heard him sing, and on the grass did bide.

But my whole day was sadder for his words,
And I was thinner
Because, in spite of my most careful plan
I missed a very pleasant little dinner . . .
In short, unless well-cooked, I don't like Birds.

Sara Teasdale

(Who got Miss Rittenhouse to read it for her.)

AT AUTUMN

I bend and watch the grackles billing,
And fight with tears as I float by;
O be a fowl for my heart's filling!
O be a bird, yet never fly!

Ezra Pound

(Mailed disdainfully by him from anywhere but America, and read prayerfully by a committee from Chicago.)

RAINUV: A ROMANTIC BALLAD FROM THE EARLY BASQUE

. . . so then naturally
This Count Rainuv I speak of
(Certainly I did not expect you would ever have heard of him;
You are American poets, aren't you?
That's rather awful . . . I am the only American poet
I could ever tolerate . . . well, sniff and pass. . . .)
Therefore . . . well, I knew Rainuv.
(My P. G. course at Penn, you'll remember;
A little Anglo-Saxon and Basuto,
But Provencal, mostly. Most don't go in for that. . . .
You haven't, of course . . . What, no Provencal?
Well, of course, I know
Rather more than you do. That's my specialty.
But then—*Omnis Gallia est divisa*—but no matter.

Not fit, perhaps you'd say, that, to be quoted
Before ladies. . . . That's your rather amusing
prudishness. . . .)
Well, this Rainuv, then,
A person with a squint like a flash
Of square fishes . . . being rather worse than
most
Of the usual *literati*
Said, being carried off by desire of boasting
That he knew all the mid-Victorians
Et ab lor bos amics:
(He thought it was something to boast of.)

We'll say he said he smoked with Tennyson,
And—deeper pit—*pax vobiscum*—went to vespers
With Adelaide Anne Procter; helped Bob Brown-
ing elope
With Elizabeth and her lapdog (said it bit him)
Said he was the first man Blake told
All about the angels in a pear-tree at Peckham
Rye
Blake drew them for him, he said; they were
grackles, not angels—
(Blake's not a mid-Victorian, but you don't know
better)
So . . . we come, being slightly irritated, to
facing him down.

". . . And George Eliot?" we ask lightly.
"Roomed with him," nodded Rainuv confidently,
"At college!" . . . Ah, *bos amic! bos amic!*
Rainuv is a king to you. . . .
Three centuries from now (you dead and messy)
men whispering insolently
(Eeni meeni mini mo . . .) will boast that their
great-grand-uncles
Were kicked by me in passing. . . .

Margaret Widdemer

(Clutching a non-existent portière with one hand.)

THE SIGHING TREE

The folk of the wood called me—
"There sits a golden bird
Upon your mother's pear-tree—"
But I never said a word.

The Sleepy People whispered—
"The bird is singing now."
But I felt not then like leaving bed
Nor listening beneath the bough.

But the wronged world beat my portals—
"Come out or be sore oppressed!"
So I threw a stone at the grackle
And my throbbing heart had rest.

SAPHIER

Richard Le Gallienne

(Advancing with a dreamy air of there still being a Yellow Book.)

BALLADE OF SPRING CHICKENS

Spring comes—yet where the dream that glows?
  There only waves upon the lea
A lonely pear-bough where doth doze
  A bird of green, and merely he:
  Why weave of him our poetry?
Why of a Grackle need we sing?
  Ah, far another fowl for me—
I seek Spring Chickens in the Spring.

Though May returns, and frisking shows
  Her ankles through this white clad tree,
Alas, old Spring's gone with the rose,
    Gone is all old romance and glee—
    Yet still a joy remains to me—
Softly our lyric lutes unstring,
  Far from this Grackle we shall flee
And seek Spring Chickens in the Spring!

Too soon Youth's *mss* must close,
  (*Omar*) its rose be pot-pourri:

What of this bird and all his woes!
  Catulla, I would fly to thee—
  Bright bird of luring lingerie,
Of bushy bob, of knees aswing,
  This golden task be mine in fee,
To seek Spring Chickens in the Spring!

Envoi

Prince, let us leave this grove, pardie,
  A flapper is a fairer thing:
Let us fare fast where such there be,
  And seek Spring Chickens in the Spring!

Angela Morgan

(Carefully lifting her Greek robe off the wet grass, and patting her fillet with one white glove, recites passionately.)

OH! BIRD!

I heard a flaming noise that screamed—
"Man, panting, crushed, must be redeemed!
Man! All the crowd of him!
Quiet or loud of him!
Men! Raging souls of them!
Heaps of them, shoals of them!
Hurtling impassioned through fiery-tongued rapture!
Leaping for glories all avid to capture
Bounteous æons of star-beating bliss!"
I heard a voice cry, and I'm sure it said this:
Though the cook said the noise was a tree and a bird . . .
But I heard! Gods, I heard!

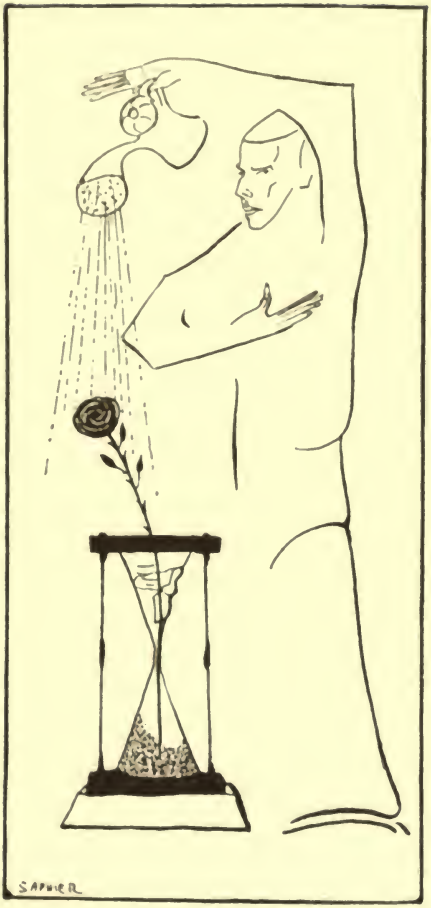
Conrad Aiken

(Creeping mysteriously out of the twilight, draped in a complex.)

THE CHARNEL BIRD

Forslin murmurs a melodious impropriety
Musing on birds and women dead æons ago. . . .
Was he not, once, this fowl, a gay bird in society?
Can any one tell? . . . After an evening out, who can know?
Perhaps Cleopatra, lush in her inadequate wrappings,
Lifted him once to her tatbebs. . . . Perhaps Helen of Troy
Found him more live than her Paris . . . a bird among dead ones. . . .
Perhaps Semiramis . . . once . . . in a pink unnamable joy * * *

I tie my shoes politely, a salute to this bird in his pear-tree;
. . . What is a pear-tree, after all. . . . What is a bird?
What is a shoe, or a Forslin, or even a Senlin?


SAPHIER

What is . . . a what? . . . Is there any one
who has heard? . . .
What is it crawls from the kiss-thickened, Freud-
ian darkness,
Amorous, catlike . . . Ah, can it be a cat?
I would so much rather it had been a scarlet
harlot,
There is so much more genuine poetry in
that. . . .

(Note by the Collator: It was, in fact, Fluffums, the Angora cat belonging to the Jenkinses on the corner; and the disappointment was too much for Mr. Aiken, who fainted away, and had to be taken back to Boston before completing his poem, which he had intended to fill an entire book.)

Mary Carolyn Davies

(Impetuously, with a floppy hat.)

A YOUNG GIRL TO A YOUNG BIRD

When one is young, you know, then one can sing
Of anything:
One is so young—so pleasurably so—
How can one know
If God made little apples, or yet pears,
Or . . . if God cares?

You are young, maybe, Grackle; that is why
I want to cry
Seeing you watch the poems that I say
To-night, to-day . . .

This little boy-bird seems to nod to me
With sympathy:
He is so young: it must be that is why . . .
As young as I!

Marguerite Wilkinson

(Advancing with sedate courtesy in a long-sleeved, high-necked lecture costume.)

THE RUNE OF THE NUDE

I will set my slim strong soul on this tree with no leaves upon it,
I will lift up my undressed dreams to the nude and ethical sky:
This bird has his feathers upon him: he shall not have even a sonnet:
Until he is stripped of his last pin-plume I will sing of my mate and I!

My ancestors rise from their graves to be shocked at my soul's wild climbing
(They were strong, they were righteous, my ancestors, but they always kept on their clothes)
My mate is the best of all mates alive: his voice is a raptured rhyming:
He chants "Come Down!" but it cannot come, either for him or those!

My ancestors pound from their ouija-board: my
mate leaps in swift indignation:
I must tell the world of their wonders, but I
must be strong and free—
Though all sires and all mates cry out in a runic
incantation,
My soul shall be stripped and buttonless—
it shall dwell in a naked tree!

Aline Kilmer

(With a certain aloofness.)

ADMIRATION

Kenton's arrogant eyes watch the Widdemer pear-tree,
His thistle-down-footed sister puts out her tongue at him. . . .
Kenton, what do you see? That yonder is only a bare tree;
Come, carry Deborah home; she is gossamer-light and slim.

"Aw, mother, but I don't want to!" Kenton replies with devotion,
"I've gathered you stones for the bird; come on, don't you want to throw 'em?"
Ah, Kenton, Kenton, my child, who but you would have such an emotion?
But in spite of it I admire you, as you'll see when you read this poem.

The Benet Brothers

(They sing arm in arm, Stephen Vincent having rather more to do with the verse and William Rose with the chorus. Their sister Laura is too busy looking for a fairy under the tree to add to the family contribution.)

THE GRACKLE OF GROG

It was old Yale College
  Made me what I am—
You oughto heard my mother
  When I first said damn!
I put a pin in sister's chair,
  She jumped sky-high . . .
I don't know what'll happen
  When I come to die!

But oh, the stars burst wild in c glorious crimson whangle,
There was foam on the beer mile-deep, mile-high, and the pickles were piled like seas,
Nœara's hair was a flapper's bob that turned to a ten-mile tangle,
And the forests were crowded with unicorns, and gold elephants charged up trees!

SAPHIER

Forceps in the dentist's chair,
Razors in the lather . . .
Lord, the black experience
I've had time to gather . . .
But I've thought of one thing
That may pull me through—
I'm a reg'lar devil
But the Devil was, too!

There were thousands of trees with knotholed knees that kicked in a league-long rapture,
Birds green as a seasick emerald in a million-mile shrieking row—
It was sixty dollars or sixty days when the cop had made his capture. . . .
But God! the bun was a gorgeous one, and the Faculty did not know!

Lola Ridge

(Who apparently did not care for the suburbs.)

PREENINGS

I preen myself. . . .
I . . .
Always do . . .
My ego expanding encompasses . . .
Everything, naturally. . . .

This bird preens himself . . .
It is our only likeness. . . .

Ah, God, I want a Ghetto
And a Freud and an alley and some Immigrants
calling names . . .
God, you know
How awful it is. . . .
Here are trees and birds and clouds
And picturesquely neat children across the way
on the grass
Not doing anything
Improper . . .
(Poor little fools, I mustn't blame them for that
Perhaps they never
Knew How. . . .)

SAPHIER

But oh, God, take me to the nearest trolley line!
This is a country landscape—
I can't stand it!

God, take me away—
There is no Sex here
And no Smell!

Edna St. Vincent Millay

(Recites in a flippant voice which occasionally chokes up with irrepressible emotion, and clenching her hands tensely as she notices that the Grackle has hopped twice.)

TEA O' HERBS

O I have brought in now
  Bergamot,
A packet o' brown senna
  And an iron pot;
In my scarlet gown
  I make all hot.

And other men and girls
  Write like me
Setting herbs a-plenty
  In their poetry
(Bergamot for hair-oil,
  Bergamot for tea!)

And they may do ill now
  Or they may do well,
(Little should I care now
  What they have to sell—)

GAPHIER

But what bergamot and rue are
  None of them can tell.

All above my bitter tea
  I have set a lid
(As my bitter heart
  By its red gown hid)
They write of bergamot
  Because I did. . . .

(From its padded hangers
  They've snatched my red gown,
Men as well as girls
  And gone down town,
Flaunting my vocabulary,
  Every verb and noun!)

And the grackle moans
  High above the pot,
He is sick with herbs . . .
  And am I not,
Who have brought in
    Bergamot?

John V. A. Weaver

(With a strong note of infant brutality.)

THE WEAVER BIRD

Gosh, kid! that bird a-cheepin' in the tree
All green an' cocky—why, it might be me
Singin' to you. . . . Wisht I was just a bird
Bringin' you worms—aw, you know, things I've
heard
'Bout me—an' flowers, maybe . . . Like as not
Somebody'd get me with an old slingshot
An' I'd be dead . . . Gee, it'd break you up!
Nothin' would be the same to you, I bet,
Knowin' my grave was out there in the wet
And we two couldn't pet no more . . . Say, kid,
It makes me weep, same as it always did,
To think how bad you'd feel. . . .

I got a thought,
An awful funny one I sorta caught—
Nobody never thought that way, I guess—
When I get blue, an' things is in a mess
I map out all my funeral, the hearses
An' nineteen carriages, an' folks with verses

Sayin' how great I was, an' all like that,
An' wreaths, an' girls with crapes around their hat
Tellin' the world how bad their hearts was broke,
An' you, just smashed to think I had to croak. . . .

I can't stand that bird, somehow—makes me cry. . . .
The world'll be darn sorry when I die!

David Morton

(Who, being very polite, only thought it.)

SONNET: TREES ARE NOT SHIPS

There is no magic in a living tree,
And, if they be not sea-gulls, none in birds:
My soul is seasick, and its only words
Murmur desire for things more like a sea.
In this dry landscape here there seems to be
No water, merely persons in large herds,
Who, by their long remarks, their arid girds,
Come from the Poetry Society.

What could be drier, where all things are dry?
What boots this bird, this pear-tree spreading wide?
Oh, make this bird they all discuss to pie,
Hew down this tree and shape its planks to ships,
Send them to sea with these folk nailed inside,
That I may have great sonnets on my lips!

Elinor Wylie

(With an air of admitting the tragic and all-important fact.)

THE GRACKLE IS THE LOON

Never believe this bird connotes
  Jade whorls of carven commonness:
Nor as from ordinary throats
  Slides his sharp song in ice-strung stress.

He is the cold and scornful Loon,
  Who, hoping that the sun shall fail,
Steeps in the silver of the moon
  His burnished claws, his chiseled tail.

Leonora Speyer

(Speaking, notwithstanding, with unshaken poise.)

A LANDSCAPE GETS PERSONAL

Beloved. . . .
I cannot bear that Bird

He is green
With envy of My Songs:
"Cheep! Cheep!"

This Tree
Has a furtive look
And the Brook
Says, "Oh . . . Splash. . . ."

And the Grass . . . the terrible Grass . . .
It waves at me. . . .
It is too flirtatious!

Beloved,
Let us leave swiftly . . .

I fear this Landscape!
It would vamp me!

SAPHIER

Corinne Roosevelt Robinson

(Who, having engagements to speak at ten unveilings, and nine public schools and twelve other symposiums, stayed away, but sent this handsome tribute by wire.)

THE SYMPOSIUM LEADING NOWHERE

I sing of the joy of the Small Paths
  The paths that lead nowhere at all,
(Though I never have gone on them nevertheless
  They are admirable, and so small!)
I go out at midnight in motors
  But, being a Roosevelt, I drive
Straight ahead on the neatly paved highway,
  For I wish with much speed to arrive.

Oh, the joy and effulgence of Small Paths
  Surrounded with Birds and with Trees
I would love to go down on a Small Path
  And sit in communion with these!
Oh, Grackle, I yearn to be with you,
  For poetic communion I yearn
But I have ten engagements to speak in the suburbs
  And alas, I've no time to return.

Oh alas, the undone moments,
Oh, the myriad hours bereft
Trying to be twenty people
And to do things right and left.
I would sit down by a Small Path
And would make me a Large Rhyme
I should love to find my soul there
But I haven't got the time!

Ridgely Torrence

(Who felt that the Bird did not sufficiently uphold Art.)

THE FOWL OF A THOUSAND FLIGHTS

Grackle, Grackle on your tree,
  There's something wrong to-day,
In the moonlight, in the quiet evening,
  You will rise and croak and fly away;
Oh, you have sat and listened till you're wild for flight
  (And that's all right)
But you have never criticised a single song
  (And that's all wrong)
Lo, would you add despair unto despair?
Do you not care
That all these lesser children of the Muse
Shall sing to you exactly as they choose?

You are ungrateful, Fowl. I wrote a poem,
Once, in the middle of August, intending to show 'em
That you should not
Be shot:
What saw I then, what heard?

Multitudes—multitudes, under the tree they
stirred,
And with too many a broken note and wheeze
They sang what each did please. . . .

And Thou,
O bird of emeraldine beak and brow,
Thou sawest it all, and did not even cackle,
Grackle!

Henry van Dyke

(Who, although for different reasons, did not care for the Grackle either.)

THE ROILING OF HENRY

(A Song of the Grating Outdoors)

Bird, thou art not a Veery,
  Nor yet a Yellowthroat,
Ne'erless, I knew thy gentle song,
  Long, long e'er I could vote;
Thou art not a Blue Flower,
  Nor e'en a real Blue Bird;
Yet there's a moral high and pure
  In all thy liltings heard:
"Grack-grack-grack-grack-grack-grack—
  Go on and ne'er look back!"

The noble tow'rs of Princeton
  Hear high thy pensive trill,
And eke my ear has heard thee
  The while I fished the rill;
Thy note rings out at daybreak
  Before I rise to toil;
Thou counselest Persistence;
  Thy song no stone can spoil;
"Grack-grack-grack-grack-grack-grack—
  Go on and ne'er look back!"

Yet, Bird, there is a limit
To all I've undergone;
From five o'clock till five o'clock
Thou'st chanted o'er my lawn;
I cannot get my work done . . .
I give thee, Bird, advice;
If thou wouldst save thy skin alive,
Let me not warn thee twice,
"Grack-grack-grack-grack-grack-grack—
Go on and ne'er look back!"

Cale Young Rice

(Who came out rather tired from trying to choose a new suit, and could not get it off his mind.)

PANTINGS

Pantings, Pantings, Pantings!
  Gents' immanent furnishings!
On a mystic tide I ride, I ride,
  Of the clothes of a million springs!
I take the train for the suburbs
  Or I sweep from Pole to Pole,
But where is the window that holds them not,
  Gents' furnishings of my soul!

Pantings, Pantings, Pantings!
  Shirtings and coatings too!
How can I think of mere birds, nor blink
  In the Cosmic Hullaballoo?
The hot world throbs with Immenseness,
  The Voidness plunks in the Void,
And all of it doubtless has something to do
  With Employer and Unemployed!

Pantings! Pantings! Pantings!
  Trousers through all the town!
And the tailors' dummies with iron for tummies
  Smirk in their blue and brown;
I float in a slithering simoon
  Of fevered and surging tints,
And my ears are dulled with the mighty throb
  Of the Male Best Dressers' Hints:

Pantings! Pantings! Pantings!
  My wardrobe, they send it fleet. . . .
Ah, the Is and the Was and the Never Does. . . .
  And the Cosmos at last complete!

Bliss Carman

(Who, incidentally, happened to be correct.)

THE WILD

Ho, Spring calls clear a message. . . .
  The Grackle is not green. . . .
The Mighty Mother Nature
  She knows just what I mean.

The lilac and the willow
  The grass and violet
They are my wild companions
  Where I was raised a pet.

The secrets of great nature
  From childhood I have heard;
Oh, I can tell a wild flower
  Swiftly from a wild bird;

And Gwendolen and Marna
  And Myrtle (dead all three . . .
Among my wildwood sweethearts
  Was much mortality).

If they my loves returning
  Might gather 'neath these boughs
(Oh, they would sniff at pear-trees
  Who loved the Northern Sloughs).

Their wild eternal whisper
  Would back me up, I ween:
"This bird is not a Grackle:
  A Grackle is not green."

THEY SEE THE BIRDIE

(Mrs. Conkling points maternally.)
Oh, Hilda! see the little Bird!
If you will watch, upon my word
He will come out; a Veery * he
As like an Oboe as can be:
He shall be wingèd, with a tail,
Mayhap a Beak him shall not fail!
And I will tell him, "Birdie, oh,
This is my Hilda, you must know—
And oh, what joy, if you but knew—
She shall make poetry on you!"

(The Birdie obliges, whereupon Hilda recites obediently, while her mother, concealing herself completely behind the bird, takes dictation.)
Oh, my lovely Mother,
That is a Bird:
Sitting on a Tree.
I am a Little Girl

* Note by the Collator: I do not pretend to explain the veery-complex of American poets. They all seemed possessed to rub it into the poor bird that he wasn't one.

Standing on the Ground.
I see the Bird,
The Bird sees me.

Bird!
Color of Grass!

I love my Mother
More than I do You!

Theodosia Garrison

(Who began cheerfully, but reduced her audience to tears, which she surveyed with complacence, by the third line.)

A BALLAD OF THE BIRD DANCE OF PIERRETTE

Pierrette's mother speaks:

"Sure is it Pierrette yez are, Pierrette and no other?
(Och, Pierrette, me heart is broke that ye shud be that same—)
Pertendin' to be Frinch, an' me yer poor ould Irish mother
That named ye Bridget fer yer aunt, a dacent Dublin name!
Ye that was a pious girrl, decked out in ruffled collars,
With yer hair that docked an' frizzed—if Father Pat shud see!
Dancin' on a piece o' grass all puddle-holes an' hollers,
Amusin' these quare folk that's called a Pote-Society!"

But it was Bridget Sullivan,
Her locks flour-sprent,
That danced beneath the flowering tree
Leaping as she went.

"If there's folk to stare at ye ye'll dance for all creation
(Since ye went to settlements 'tis little else I've heard),
Letting yer good wages go to chat of 'inspiration,'
Flappin' up an' down an' makin' out yez are a burrd!
Sure if ye got cash fer it 'tis little I'd be sayin'
(Och, Pierrette, stenographin' 'tis better wage ye'll get,)
Sorra wan these long-haired folk has spoke till ye o' payin',
Talkin' of yer art, an' ye a leppin' in the wet!"

But it was Bridget Sullivan,
Her head down-bent,
Went back on the three-thirteen,
Coughing as she went.

William Griffith
(Who felt for her.)

PIERRETTE REMEMBERS AN ENGAGEMENT

Pierrette has gone—but it was not
  Exactly that she lied;
She said she had to catch a train;
  "I have a date," she cried.

To keep a sudden rendezvous
  It came into her mind
As quite the quickest way to flee
  From parties of this kind;

She went most softly and most soon,
  But still she made a stir,
For, going, she took all the men
  To town along with her.

Edgar Guest

(Who has an air of absolute belief in the True, the Optimistic, and the Checkbook. He seems yet a little ill at ease among the others, and to be looking about restlessly for Ella Wheeler Wilcox.)

AIN'T NATURE WONDERFUL!

How dear to me are home and wife,
The dear old Tree I used to Love,
The Pear it shed on starting life
And God's Outdoors so bright above!

For Virtue gets a high reward,
Noble is all good Scenery,
So I will root for Virtue hard,
For God, for Nature, and for Me!

SAPHIER

Don Marquis

(Who, it appears, refers to departments which he and certain of his friends run in New York papers. He swings a theoretical barrel of hootch above his head, and chants:)

THE MEETING OF THE COLUMNS

Chris and Frank and I
  Each had a column;
Chris and I were plump and gay,
But not so F.P.A.:
  F.P.A. was solemn—
  Not so his Column;
That was full of wit,
  As good as My Column
Nearly every bit!
We sat on each an office chair
  And all snapped our scissors;
Their things were pretty fair
  But all of mine were Whizzers!

Frank wrote of Cyril,
  An ungrammatic sinner,
But I wrote of Drink
  And Chris wrote of Dinner;
  And Frank kept getting thinner

And we kept getting plump—
Frank sat like a Bump
  Translating from the Latin,
Chris wrote of Happy Homes
I wrote of Alcoholic Foams,
  And we still seemed to fatten;
Frank wrote of Swell Parties where he had been,
I wrote of Whisky-sours, and Chris wrote of Gin!
But we both got fatter,
So the parties didn't matter,
Though F.P.A. he published each as soon as he'd
    been at her. . . .

F.P.A. went calling
  And sang about it sorely . . .
"Pass around the shandygaff," says brave old
    Morley!
F.P.A. played tennis
  And told the World he did. . . .
I bought a stein of beer and tipped up the lid!
Frank wrote up all his evenings out till we began
    to cry,
But we drowned our envy in a long cool Rye!

And then we got an invitation, Frank and Chris
    and me,
To come and say a poem on a Grackle in a Tree:

WA HA HA
SOPHIER

But Chris and I'd had twenty ryes, and we began
to cackle—
"Oh, see the ninety pretty birds, and every one
a Grackle!
A Grackle with a Hackle,
A ticklish one to tackle
A tacklish one to tickle . . .
To ticker . . .
To licker. . . ."
And we both began to giggle
And woggle, and wiggle,
And we giggled and we gurgled
And we gargled and were gay . . .
For we'd had an invitation, just the same as
F.P.A.!

Christopher Morley

(Acting, in spite of himself, as if the Bird were his long-lost brother, and locating the Grackle, for poetic purposes, in his own home.)

THE MOCKING-HOARSE BIRD

Good fowl, though I would speak to thee
With wonted geniality,
And Oxford charm in my address,
It's not quite easy, I confess:
Suaviter in modo's hard
When poets trample one's front yard,
And this is such an enormous crew
That you've got trailing after you!
I'd washed my youngest child but four,
Put the milk-bottles out the door,
Paid my wife's hat-bill with no sigh
(Ah, happy wife! Ah, happy I!)
Tossed down (see essays) then my pen
To be a private citizen,
Written about that in the Post,
When lo, upon the lawn a host
Of Poets, sprung upon my sight
Each eager for a Poem to write!

To a less placid bard you'd be
A flat domestic tragedy,—
Bird—grackle—nay, I'd scarcely call
You bird—a mere egg you, that's all—
Only a bad egg has the nerve
To poach (a pun!) on my preserve!
To P.Q.S. and X.Y.D.
(Both columnists whom you should see)
And L.M.N (a man who never
Columns a word that isn't clever,)
And B.C.D (who scintillates
Much more than most who get his rates)
A thing like this would be a trial. . . .
It is to me, there's no denial.

Why, Bird, if they would sing of you,
Or Sin, or Broken Hearts, or Rue,
Or what Young Devils they all are,
Or Scarlet Dames, or the First Star,
Or South-Sea-Jazz-Hounds sorrowing,
It would be quite another thing:
But, Bird, here they come mousing round
On my suburban, sacred ground,
And see my happiness—it's flat,
You wretched Bird, they'll sing of that!
They'll hymn my Happy Hearth, and later
The joys of my Refrigerator,

Burst into song about the points
Of Babies, Married Peace, Hot Joints,
The Jimmy-Pipe I often carol,
My Commutation, my Rain-Barrel,
And each Uncontroverted Fact
With which my poetry is packed . . .
In short, base Bird, they'll sing like me,
And then, where will my living be?

Franklin P. Adams

(Coldly ignoring the roistering of his friends, addresses the Grackle with bitterness:)

TO A GRACKLE

(Horace, Ode XVIXXV, p. 23)

Bird, if you think I do not care
To gaze upon your feathered form
Rather than converse with some fair
Or make my brow with tennis warm;

If you should think I'd liefer far
Hear your sweet song than fast be driving
Within my costly motor car
And in my handsome home arriving,

If you should think I would be gone
Far sooner than you might expect
From off this uncolumnar lawn;
Bird, you'd be utterly correct!

Tom Daly

(Showing the Italian's love of the Beautiful, which he makes his own more than the Anglo-Saxon dreams of doing.)

CARLO THE GARDENER

De poets dey tinka dey gotta da tree,
Dey gotta da arta, da birda—but me,
I lova da arta, I lova da flower,
(Ah, *bella fioretta!*) I waita da hour:
I mowa da grass, I rake uppa da leaf—
I brava young Carlo—Maria! fine t'ief!
I waita
Till later.

Da poets go homa, go finda da sup',
I creep by dis tree and I digga her up,
(Da Grackla, da blossom, da tree-a I love,
Per Dio! and da art!) So I giva da shove,
I catcha da birda, I getta da tree,
I taka to Rosa my wife, and den she—
She gotta
In potta!

Vachel Lindsay

(Bounding on toward the end of the proceedings with a bundle over his shoulder, and making the rest join in at the high spots.)

THE HOBOKEN GRACKLE AND THE HOBO

(An Explanation)

As I went marching, torn-socked, free, [*Steadily*]
With my red heart marching all agog in front of me
And my throbbing heels
And my throbbing feet
Making an impression on the Hoboken street [*With energy*]
Then I saw a pear-tree, a fowl, a bird,
And the worst sort of noise an Illinoiser ever heard! [*With surprise*]
Banks—of—poets—round—that—tree—
All of the *Po*etry Soc*i*ety but *me!*
All a-cackle, addressed it as a grackle [*Chatteringly like parrots*]
Showed me its hackle (that proved it was a fly)

Tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, [*Cooingly, yet with impatience*]
Gosh, what a packed street!
The Secretary, *President* and TREASURER
went by!
"That's not a grackle," said I to all of him,
Seething with their poetry, iron-tongued, grim,
"That's an English sparrow on that limb!"
And they all went home
No more to roam.
And I watched their unmade poetry
raise up like foam [*Intemperately*]
And I took my bandanna again on
my stick [*With calm majesty*]
And I walked to the grocery and took my pick
And I bought crackers, canned
shrimps, corn, [*With domesticity for the moment*]
Codfish like flakes of snow at morn,
Buns for breakfast and a fountain-pen
Laid down change and marched out again
And I walked through Hoboken, torn-socked, free,
With my red heart galumphing all agog in front
of me!

RAPHIER

DIES ILLA: A BIRD OF A MASQUE

Being a Collaboration by Percy Mackaye, Isabel Fiske Conant and Josephine Preston Peabody.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE GRACKLE (who does not appear at all)
THE SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP
THE SPIRIT OF MODERN POETRY
CHORUS OF ELDERLY LADIES WHO APPRECIATE POETRY
CHORUS OF CORRESPONDENCE, KINDERGARTEN, GRAMMAR, HIGH-SCHOOL AND COLLEGE CLASSES IN VERSE-WRITING
CHORUS OF YOUNG MEN RUNNING POETRY MAGAZINES
CHORUS OF POETRY CRITICS
CHORUS OF ASSORTED CULTURE-HOUNDS
THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POETIC RENAISSANCE IN AMERICA
THE NON-POETRY WRITING PUBLIC (Composed of two citizens who have never learned to read or write)
SEMI-CHORUSES OF MAGAZINE EDITORS AND BOOK-PUBLISHERS
ATÉ, GODDESS OF DISCORD
THE MUSE
TIME: *Next year.* PLACE: *Everywhere.* SCENE: *A level stretch of monotony.*

THE SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP *(Entering despairingly)*

Alas—in vain! Yet I have barred the way
As best I might, that this great horror fall
Not on the world. *Returned with many thanks*
And not because of lack of merit, I

Have said to twenty million poets . . . nay . . .
Profane it not, that word . . . to twenty million
Persons who wasted stamps and typewriting
And midnight oil, to add unto the world
More Bunk. . . . In vain—in vain!
(She sinks down sobbing.)

(From right and left of stage enter Semi-Choruses of Magazine Editors and Book Publishers, tearing their hair rhythmically.)

SEMI-CHORUS OF EDITORS

We have mailed their poems back
To every man and woman-jack
Who weigh the postman down
From country and from town;
But all in vain, in vain,
They mail them in again!

SEMI-CHORUS OF PUBLISHERS

Though we've sent them flying,
We are nearly dying,
From the books of poetry
Sent by people unto we;
In vain we keep them off our shelves,
They go and publish them themselves!

All, bravely have ye toiled, my masters, aye,
And I've toiled with you . . . All in vain, in
vain—

(Enter, with a proud consciousness of duty well done, the Chorus of Correspondence, Kindergarten, Grammar, High-School and College Classes for Writing Verse. They sing Joyously)

The Day has come that we adore,
The Day we've all been working for,
Now babies in their bassinets
And military school cadets,
And chambermaids in each hotel
And folks in slums who cannot spell,
Professors, butchers, clergymen,
And every one, have grabbed a pen:
The Day has come—tra la, tra lee—
Everybody writes poetry!

(They do a Symbolic Dance with Typewriters, during which enters the Chorus of Young Men who Run Poetry Magazines. These put on horn-rimmed spectacles and chant earnestly as follows)

CHORUS OF YOUNG MEN WHO RUN POETRY MAGAZINES

We're very careful what we put in;
This magazine is of highest grade;
If it doesn't appeal to our personal taste
There's no use sending it, we're afraid;
We don't like Shelley, we don't like Keats,
We don't like poets who're tactlessly dead;
If you write like us there will be no fuss—
That's the best of verse, when the last word's said. . . . *(Bursting irrepressibly into youthful enthusiasm, and dashing their horn spectacles to the ground)*
Yale! Yale! Yale!
Our Poetry!
Fine Poetry!
Nobody Else's Poetry!
Raw! Raw! Raw! Raw!

(Enter, modestly, the Person Responsible for the Poetic Renaissance in America. There are four of him—or her, as the case may be—Miss Monroe, Miss Rittenhouse, Mrs. Stork, Mr. Braithwaite. The Person stands in a row and recites in unison:)

I've made Poetry
What it is today;
Or . . . at least . . .
That's what people say:
Earnest-minded effort
Never can be hid;
The Others think They did it—
But—I—Did!

SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP, EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS, *(faintly:)*

You *did? (They rush out.)*

Person Responsible *(still modestly)*

Well, so they say—
But I have to go away.
I'm due at a lecture
I give at three today. *(The Person goes out in single file, looking at its watch. As it does so, there enters a pale and dishevelled girl in Greek robes. It is the Muse.)*

MUSE:

In Mount Olympus we have heard a noise and crying
As swine that in deep agony are dying,
A voice of tom-cats wailing,
A never failing

Thud as of rolling logs:
A chattering like frogs,
And all this noise, unceasing, thunderous,
Making a horrible fuss,
Cries out upon my name.
Oh, what am I, the Muse and giver of Fame,
So to be mocked and humbled by this use?
I—I, the Muse!

(Enter Spirit of Modern Poetry, a lady with bobbed hair, clad lightly in horn glasses and a sex-complex.)

SPIRIT OF MODERN POETRY

You're behind the times; quite narrow,
Don't you want
Culture for the masses?

MUSE

No; I am Greek; we never did.
Besides, it *isn't* culture.

CHORUS OF ELDERLY LADIES WHO APPRECIATE POETRY, *(trotting by two by two on their way to a lecture, pause.)*

Oh, how narrow! Oh, how shocking!
She's no Muse! She must be mocking!

MUSE *(sternly, having lost her temper by this time)*

I am a goddess. Trifle not with me.

ELDERLY LADIES *(with resolute tolerance)*

She *looks* like a pupil of Isadora Duncan,
But she says she's a goddess; what folly we'd be sunk in
To believe a word she says; she needs broad'ning, we conjecture —
My dear, come with us to Miss Rittenhouse's lecture!

MUSE *(lifting her arms angrily)*

Até, my sister!

ATE, *(behind the scenes)* I come!

(Enter from one side, Band of Poets—very large—with lyres and wreaths put on over their regular clothes. From the other side, a chorus of Poetry Critics. At their end steals Até, Goddess of Discord, disguised as a Critic by means of horn glasses and a Cane. The Poets do not see her—or anything but themselves, indeed. They sing obliviously)

My maiden aunt in Keokuk
She writes free verse like anything;
My great-grandmother is in luck,
She's sold her three-piece work on Spring;
My mother does Poetic Plays,
My dad does rhymes while signing checks,
And my flapper sister—we wouldn't have missed her—
She's writing an epic on Sin and Sex—
The world's as perfect as it can be,
Everybody writes Poetry!

CHORUS OF CRITICS, *(chanting yet more loudly:)*
The world's not *quite* as perfect as it *yet* might be,
Excepting for our brother-critics' poetry!

The Spirit of Discord now creeps softly out from among the Critics.)

SPIRIT OF DISCORD
Rash poets, think what you would do—
There's nobody left you can read it to!

POETS *(aghast)*
We never thought of that!
An audience, 'tis flat,

Is our most pressing need,
To listen to our screed;
(Each turns to his neighbor)
Base scribbler, get thee hence
Or be my audience!

Semi-chorus:
We want to write ourselves! We'll not!

Semi-chorus:
But what *you* write is merely rot!
Hush up and let *me* read
My great, eternal screed!

ATÉ *(stealthily)* Ha, ha!

(Each Poet now draws a Fountain Pen with a bayonet attached, and kills the Poet next him, dying himself immediately from the wound of the Poet on the other side. They fall in neat windrows. There are no Poets left. Meanwhile the Non-Poetry-Writing Public, two in number, who have been shooting crap in a corner, rise up at the sound of the fall, take three paces to the front, and speak:)

What's the use o' poetry, anyhow? *I* always say, 'if you wanta say anything you can say it a lot easier in prose.' *I* never wrote no poetry, and I get along fine in the hardware business.

CHORUS OF CRITICS AND CULTURE-HOUNDS, *(thrilled:)*

Ah, a new Gospel!
Let us write Reviews
About it!

THE SPIRIT OF THE REJECTION SLIP *(entering, and addressing the Editors and Publishers who follow her.)*

Now I shall pass from you. My task comes to a close.
I wing my hallowed way
To the Fool-Killer's Paradise, and there for aye
Repose.

EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS

Nay, our great helper, nay!
Leave us not yet, our only comforter!
We'll need thee still;
Folks who write poetry
There's naught on earth can kill!

(During this the CULTURE-HOUNDS, CRITICS, *etc., have clustered round the* NON-POETRY-WRITING PUBLIC, *whispering, urging, and pushing. It rises and scratches its head in a flattered way, and finally says:)*

B'gosh, I do believe,
Now that you speak of it, I could do just as good
As any of those there fool dead fellers could!

(The late Non-Poetry-Writing Public are both immediately invested with lyres, and wreaths which they put on over their derby hats.)

SEMI-CHORUS OF EDITORS *(to Spirit of Rejection Slip)*
You see? Too late!

SEMI-CHORUS OF PUBLISHERS
Who shall escape o'ermastering tragic fate?

(They go off and sob in two rows in the corners, while the rest of the Masque, except ATÊ, *who looks at them as if she weren't through yet, and the* MUSE, *form up to do a dance symbolic of One Being Born Every Minute. They sing:)*

The Day has come that we adore,
The Day we've all been working for;
The Day has come, tra la, tra lee!
Everybody writes Poetry!

THE MUSE *(unnoticed in the background)*
Farewell.

Arthur Guiterman

(He recites with appropriate gestures.)

A TREE WITH A BIRD IN IT: A RHYMED REVIEW

It seems that Margaret Widdemer
  Possessed a Tree with a Bird in it,
And being human, prone to err,
  Thought 'twould be pleasant to begin it,

Or christen it, as one might say,
  By asking poets closely herded
To come around and spend the day
  And sing of what the Tree and Bird did.

(Poor girl! When next she takes her pen
  Some bromide critic's sure to say,
"Don't dare do serious work again—
  This stuff is your true métier!")

No sooner said than done; the bards
  Rush out in quantities surprising,
And, overflowing four front yards
  They carol till the moon is rising;

With ardor, or, as some say, "pash,"
In song kind or satirical,
Asking, apparently, no cash,
They make their offerings lyrical.

I'd be the first a spear to break
For Poesy; but this to tackle . . .
It seems a lot of fuss to make
About one Tree and one small Grackle.

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